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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001094

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: BAGHDAD SITUATION REPORT: APRIL 8, 2200 LOCAL

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Greg D'Elia for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Muqtada Al-Sadr (MAS) announced on April 8 that he had postponed indefinitely a "million-strong" demonstration originally scheduled for April 9 in Sadr City. The march had been planned to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the fall of Baghdad. News media also reported Sadr threatened to end the nine-month long cease-fire, which has been credited with much of the reduction in violence. Ahmad Chalabi told us that Sadr would lift the cease-fire if the GOI refuses to end the curfew in Baghdad. The GOI remains focused on its efforts to defeat Jaysh Al-Madhi (JAM), including preventing young men between the ages of 15-35 from traveling to Baghdad from the south to participate in the demonstration. Over the past two days, Sadr City residents reported to our PRTs and ePRTs that they feel imprisoned within their homes, while out in the streets sporadic fighting continues between JAM elements and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). A growing propaganda war has all sides leveling rampant accusations against their rivals, adding to the already extremely tense environment. Iran's Foreign Ministry, in a statement critical of Coalition and GOI operations in Sadr City, for the first time also condemned the rocket and mortar attacks launched by Sadr supporters against the International Zone (IZ). End Summary.

Sadr Million Man March Postponed

12. (C) Muqtada Al-Sadr (MAS) announced via the Sadrism semi-official web site on April 8 that he has indefinitely postponed a "million-strong" demonstration originally scheduled for April 9 in Sadr City. Sadr had planned the march to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the fall of Baghdad. Our southern PRTs reported that ISF were blocking southern Iraqi men between the ages of 15-35 from traveling to Baghdad to participate in the demonstration, and that this and other GOI efforts to curtail participation in the march may have contributed to Sadr's decision to postpone.

Will Sadr End the Current Cease-fire?

13. (C) Former Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Chalabi told us on April 8 that unless the curfew in Baghdad is lifted, MAS would end his cease-fire. In his statement, MAS encouraged his supporters to continue their resistance against the occupiers "that have vandalized our land and attacked our holy sites and killed our youth, women, children, and elders indiscriminately."

ISF Blocks Travel

14. (C) In the southern provinces of Babil and Najaf, PRTOffs report that the Ministry of Interior has enforced a ban on men between the ages of 15-35 from traveling to Baghdad. This, according to our PRTOffs, may have played a role in

Sadr's decision to postpone the march.

Anxiety High Among Sadr City Residents

15. (SBU) Sadr City residents remain for the most part hunkered down within their homes, only venturing out to buy necessities from local markets in their neighborhoods. Locals in contact with Baghdad PRT report that Sadr City is on edge, with anxiety building over the uncertainty of the situation. The prison-like atmosphere that has pervaded Sadr City over the recent days has been compounded by the GOI-imposed curfew, announced to last from 7:00pm April 8 until 7:00pm April 9. Residents told PRTOffs that they are increasingly frustrated with everyone, feeling animosity towards JAM and MAS, Prime Minister Maliki and the GOI, and Coalition forces alike.

Baghdad's Political Rivals Express Irreconcilable Views

16. (C) Baghdad Provincial Council (PC) Chairman Mueen al-Khademy told Baghdad PRT Team Leader April 7 that there was "little room left to negotiate" with the Sadrists. Chairman Mueen, leader of the majority ISCI/Badr coalition on the PC, sees the latest violence in Sadr City and elsewhere as evidence that the Sadrists have little respect for legitimate government and must be treated like the criminals they are. He stopped short of complete support for Maliki's hard line, however, and said he supported a strategy of undermining the Sadrists in the public's eye by publicizing their nefarious behavior.

17. (C) One of Baghdad's leading Sadrist-affiliated

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politicians, Deputy Mayor Naeem Aboub al-Kaby, told Baghdad PRTOff that the Coalition, by supporting Maliki's actions against JAM, is playing into the hands of those calling the shots in Tehran. He justified the actions of MAS and other Sadrist leaders as legitimate resistance against both "the American occupation" and the "Iranian invasion," referring to his ISCI/Badr rivals as pawns of the regime in Tehran. Naeem supports more open dialogue between the Coalition and the Sadrists, stating that there was much 'common ground' to be found between them. He deplored the conditions Sadr City residents are facing and hoped that the ISF and Coalition forces, who he credited with creating such hardships, would back off and leave Sadr City "in peace."

Iran Condemns Attacks on IZ

18. (SBU) The AP reported today that Iran, for the first time, condemned attacks on the International Zone by MAS supporters. A statement appearing on the Iranian state broadcasting company web site, a Foreign Ministry spokesman criticized the attacks, but also denounced raids by Coalition Forces against Sadr City.

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